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Review

MARIE-LAURE DERAT, *Le domaine des rois éthiopiens (1270–1527):
Espace, pouvoir et monachisme*

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MARIE-LAURE DERAT, *Le domaine des rois éthiopiens (1270–1527): Espace, pouvoir et monachisme* (Histoire ancienne et médiévale 72), Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne 2003. 383 pp. Price: € 25,–. ISBN: 2–85944–480–7.

Although it is frequently referred to as a Golden period in Church history, the years from 1270–1527 have been the subject of comparatively few historical synthesis. As Derat herself notes, only Taddesse Tamrat's classic *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1527*¹ and Steven Kaplan's *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia*² have previously attempted to survey this period. Thus, under any circumstances the publication of Marie-Laure Derat's book, *Le domaine des rois éthiopiens (1270–1527)* would be a welcome addition to the field. However, her masterful control of both primary and secondary sources combined with her sensitivity and clear-headedness make the appearance of this book a notable event.

Derat focuses almost exclusively on the regions of Amhara and Šäwa. In the first part of the book (19–84) she explores the emergence of these regions as the center of the Christian Ethiopian kingdom. In the second part (87–206) she examines relations between the monastic clergy of these regions and the Ethiopian emperors. Finally (209–313), she considers the importance of royal churches and monasteries as the religious arm of the Solomonic kings.

In comparison to Taddesse and Kaplan, Derat's primary interest lies in reconstructing the history of the texts and their transmission. She is, moreover, far more skeptical regarding their reliability as historical sources than either of them. Indeed, it often appears that her primary concern is the history of her sources rather than the history of the events which they recount. At times this leads to some of her most important contributions.

This is perhaps best illustrated by her discussion of the traditions of conflict between the monks of Amhara and Šäwa and the kings ʿAmdä Šeyon and Säyfä Arʿad (pp. 144–152). Through a careful comparison of the different accounts of these conflicts and a dating of the redactions of the *gädlät*, she concludes that the acts of Bäšälotä Mikaʿel represent the earliest account of these events. While she stops short of arguing that his *gädl* contains the only authentic account, she casts serious doubts as to the historicity of the other traditions. Indeed, she concludes that “Il s’agit d’une histoire stéréotypée, employée dans les textes pour attester de la sainteté d’un moine.” (152) Behind this modest statement lies a major departure from the views of Taddese

¹ TADDESSE TAMRAT, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1527*, Oxford 1972.

² STEVEN KAPLAN, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia*, Wiesbaden 1984 (Studien zur Kulturkunde 73).

and Kaplan. If she is correct, the clash between the clergy affiliated with Däbrä Libanos and the emperors is primarily the stuff of legend, and a major chapter in 14th century history must be rewritten. The analysis of this and other similar episodes is, moreover, central to the larger structure of Derat's work, much of which is devoted to exploring the literary expressions of the changing relationships between clergy and monarchy during this period.

Derat's sensitivity to literary questions is throughout one of the major strengths of her work. Over 35 years have passed since the publication of the third edition of Cerulli's *Storia della letteratura etiopica*³. Although several important articles on the history of Ethiopic literature have been published in the interval, no book length study has appeared. Thus, the important contributions of Kropp, Getatchew, Marrassini, Bausi and Colin, to name just a few, have not yet been integrated into a single framework. Derat makes a major contribution to filling this gap through a series of mini-studies scattered throughout her book. At numerous points she devotes herself to issues such as the history of the title *‘aqqabe sä‘at* (92–95) or of the royal prison of Amba Gəšan 24–29.

Often the results are summarized in a table. By my count there are 13 tables and 11 maps in the volume. It would have been helpful if these had been numbered and were listed in the book's table of contents. At present only the last three tables which appear in an appendix are listed in the Table of Contents.

Derat's book is a must read for anyone seriously interested in pre-modern Ethiopia. Historical reconstructions which have remained unchallenged for several decades or more must now be revisited. While Taddesse Tamrat's pioneering work remains the most accessible presentation of the history of the period 1270–1527, scholars interested in the texts behind the story will find no better source than Marie-Laure Derat's book.

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RICHARD CAULK, *“Between the Jaws of Hyenas”: a Diplomatic History of Ethiopia (1876–1896)*; edited and with an introduction by Bahru Zewde = Aethiopistische Forschungen 60. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002. 688 pp.; hardback. Price: € 73,–. ISBN 3–447–04558–2, ISSN 0170–3196.

The sovereignty of the Ethiopian state has never been so menacingly challenged from outside as it was in the second half of the 19th century. The trial

³ ENRICO CERULLI, *Storia della letteratura etiopica*, Milano 1958 [3rd 1968].